

realize we are all getting older. I happen to be 52 years old. I was born in 1951. There were more babies born in 1951 than any other year, we are the peak of the baby boomers, and we are looking at this thing and saying, are there ways we can begin to put money away for long-term care. One of the ways you can do that is with medical savings accounts. But it is a glaring omission and it is terribly unfair to say that private employees in the private markets can go ahead and have access to these medical savings accounts but public employees cannot.

And so today I am introducing along with my colleagues the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. SABO), the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. PETERSON), the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. RAMSTAD), the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. KENNEDY), the gentleman from Minnesota (Ms. MCCOLLUM) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. KLINE) the Minnesota MSA Empowerment Act of 2003. Essentially what this bill will do is allow public employees on a pilot program basis to have access to the same kind of programs that private employees have access to. It is a very good bill. It is a way for us to actually find out just how well these MSAs will work, especially with public employees. I am confident that they will work if they are given a chance. This is a pilot program just for Minnesota to demonstrate that MSAs will work for the consumer, they will work to help reduce the cost of health care and ultimately make it possible so people can begin to set aside dollars long-term for long-term care.

This is a good piece of legislation. I hope the people of the appropriate policy committees will give it a fairing hearing and if they will I am confident that ultimately this will become law. Mr. Speaker, I hope my colleagues will join me in support of this important legislation.

CONCERNING THE CONFERENCE REPORT ON THE BUDGET RESOLUTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I rise on the floor to call attention to the fiscal year 2004 budget resolution conference report and to express my opposition to the inclusion of any Medicaid or Medicare cuts as part of the final budget resolution.

Mr. Speaker, although the House-passed budget reconciliation contains an instruction to cut the Medicaid program by \$93 billion over 10 years, neither the Senate budget resolution nor the administration budget includes such devastating cuts to the Medicaid program. As Members know, the Medicaid program provides essential health coverage to 47 million low-income chil-

dren, working families, seniors and people with disabilities. Moreover, this critical safety net program under Medicare also contributes significantly to State economies by stimulating employment and business activity which we cannot afford to undermine.

States, Mr. Speaker, are currently facing the most severe budget crisis since World War II and nearly every State has proposed or enacted cuts in its Medicaid program. Any reduction in Federal Medicaid funding would place millions of vulnerable Americans now receiving Medicaid in jeopardy of losing their health insurance. Federal funding reductions would force States to implement even deeper cuts by restricting eligibility, eliminating or reducing critical health benefits and severely cutting or freezing provider reimbursement rates. As a result, Medicaid funding cuts would add millions more to the ranks of the 41 million Americans that are already uninsured.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I oppose inclusion in the budget of sweeping mandatory cuts of potentially \$75 billion over 10 years to the Medicare program. Although the Republican budget on the surface level appears to take a softer line on Medicare cuts as compared to Medicaid, in fact the budget requires billions of dollars of mandatory program cuts to the Medicare program. I will show my colleagues how. The budget provides \$400 billion in a reserve fund for Medicare reform. However, the budget also instructs the Committee on Energy and Commerce to come up with \$107 billion that have to be in cuts to either Medicare, Medicaid or SCHIP, the kids' health insurance program, over 10 years and also requires the Committee on Ways and Means to require \$62 billion in cuts, some or all of which could fall on Medicare. So although there is not an absolute requirement that it comes from Medicare, because those two committees will not have many choices, we are going to see Medicare cuts as well, as well as the mandatory Medicaid cuts.

Mr. Speaker, while the budget resolution does not direct Medicare cuts, I am very concerned because it does not preclude them and these committees will be allowed to cut Medicare if that is what is required to fulfill the reconciliation instructions. As a member of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, I would do my best to prevent such cuts from taking place because the effects would be devastating to the structure and function of the Medicare program and, more importantly, to the health of our seniors and disabled.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I have to express my strong opposition to the inclusion of any Medicaid or Medicare cuts in the final budget resolution. They will only mean that more people will be uninsured, less health care services will be provided to a whole range of individuals, and all this is being done basically so that the Republicans can make more cuts for wealthy people, more tax cuts for the wealthy, more tax cuts for

corporate interests. It should not be done at the expense of Medicare or Medicaid.

IN MEMORY OF SERGEANT DONALD WALTERS, OREGON SERVICEMAN WHO MADE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the gentlewoman from Oregon (Ms. HOOLEY) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Ms. HOOLEY of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay my respect to a fallen soldier, a hero from my district who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

Sergeant Donald Walters grew up in Colorado, Springs, Colorado. His family moved to Salem, Oregon, when he was in middle school. As a teenager, Donald worked at a Salem grocery store. He liked to fish, camp and had a long-standing interest in the military. He wanted to make a difference. A year after graduating from North Salem High School, he joined the Army.

Donald was an aspiring writer of children's books. Donald served in the first Persian Gulf war, then left the military about 2 years ago. As a testament to his undying love of our country, he reenlisted in the Army after September 11. For the weeks that Sergeant Walters was missing in action, his community in Oregon showed their support. Nearly every house on the block was adorned with an American flag, a yellow ribbon, or both. Sergeant Walters leaves behind his wife Stacie, three loving daughters, his parents Arlene and Norman, and his sister Kimberly. To all those who he left behind, my heart and prayers are with you as well as the hearts and prayers of a grateful Nation. We will not forget you, Sergeant Donald Walters.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 11 a.m.), the House stood in recess until noon.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT) at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Daniel P. Coughlin, offered the following prayer: Lord God, because Your prophet Jeremiah is so highly personal, agonizing for his people and constantly interacting with the members of his community, he becomes a model for the Members of the 108th Congress.

His hopes and visions, doubts and hesitations, anger and resentments, as